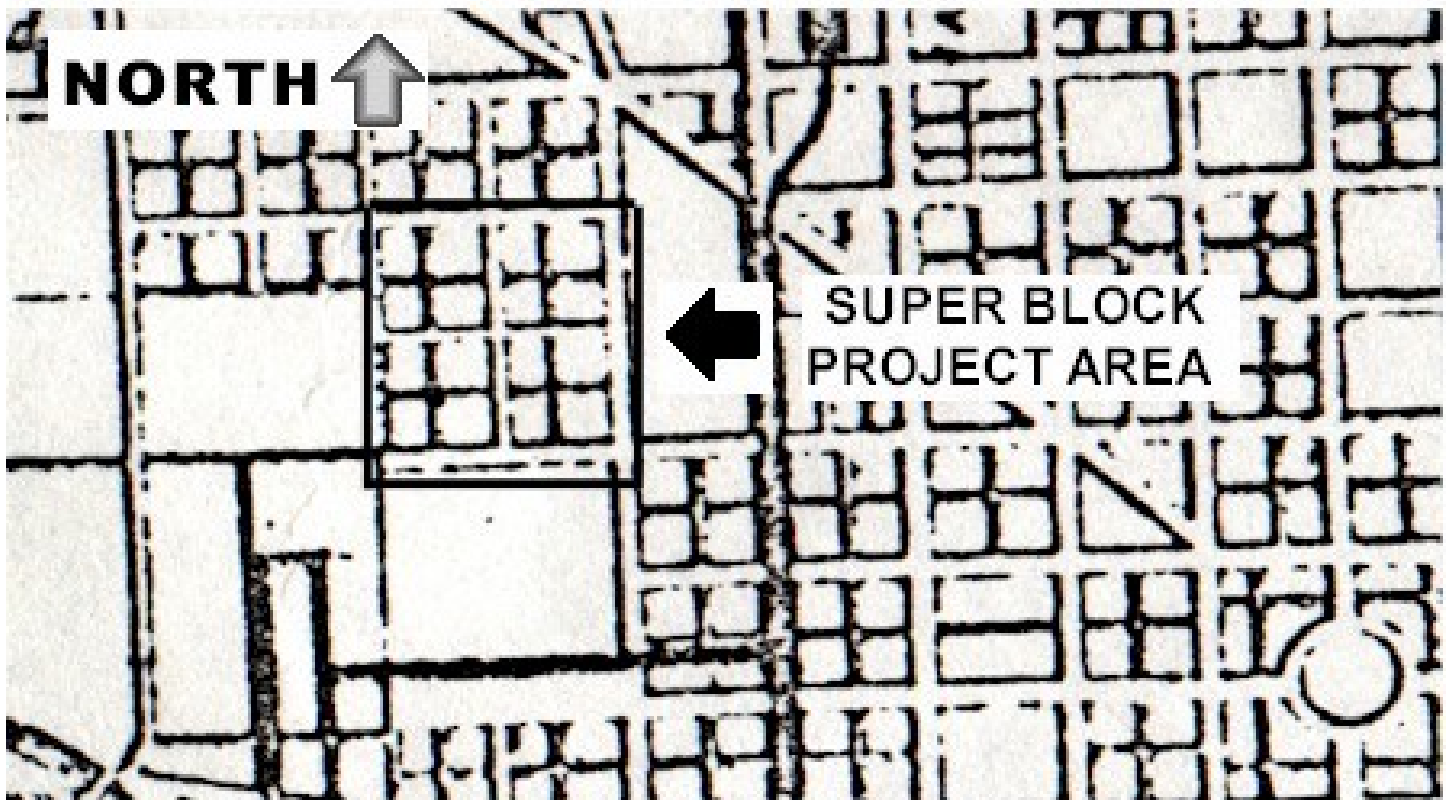




The Super Block: Life and Work in Historic Indianapolis

Evans-Deschler Site, Ransom Place Archaeology
Project Field School (Summer, 2001)

Sophia Matzinger, Bea Paras, AJ Rademacher
December 6, 2023

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“Many elders and some not-so-old folks can remember life in the near-Westside very clearly. The seemingly unimportant details of everyday life--where kids played, who employed folks in the community, what people did for a living, where they shopped, how they decorated their homes--are the very things we want to know about before they become forgotten.”

An Acknowledgement

In central Indiana, the city of Indianapolis has long been the vibrant center of culture for the state. It is also home to Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis (IUPUI), a public research university where a series of archaeological, historical, as well as ethnographic investigations were conducted by Dr. Paul Mullins. Part of what these investigations brought to light is explored here: a glimpse into the lives of those who lived in Indianapolis prior to being displaced by an expanding university campus.

Dedicating his life about the discriminatory lending practices executed throughout the history of Indiana's capital, Dr. Mullins sought to circulate the understanding behind redlining, gentrification, and urban development. Its historical significance lies in its ability to unveil the systemic obstacles faced by marginalized communities, notably in the case of Indiana Avenue.

Understanding IUPUI's contribution to displacing a Black neighborhood on the near west side accentuates the far-reaching consequences of institutional decisions, emphasizing the critical of addressing past injustices and striving for fair urban development. Among the important work Dr. Mullins has conducted, the Evans-Deschler site, or the "Super Block" of downtown Indianapolis delves into the inclusive and community-driven approaches to



Paul Mullins, PhD, speaking to class.

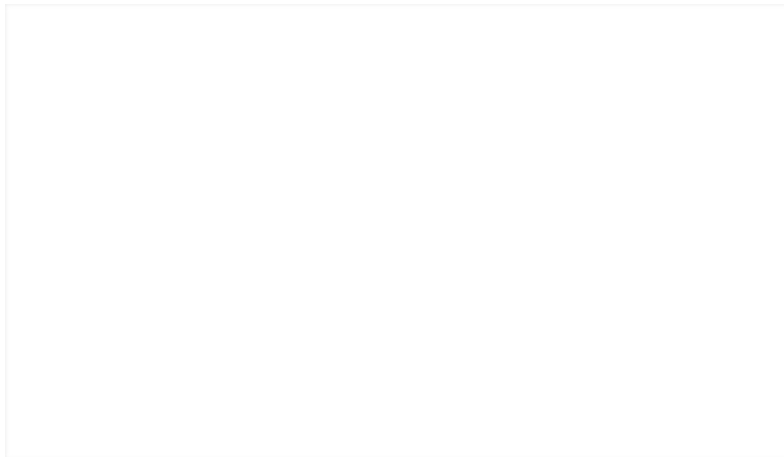
prevent catalyzing marginalization and promote sustainable urban growth.

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"Everybody's life is meaningful--I mean, that seems like not much of a point but obviously, it's fundamentally powerful to me."

Dr. Paul Mullins for the *IndyStar*

We'd like to extend our gratitude to The Ransom Place Archaeology Field School, for unveiling the multicultural communities living in west of downtown Indianapolis, as their work has done nothing but advance the conceptualization of the cultural complexity coursing through these urban neighborhoods.



Official banner of the Ransom Place Archaeology Field School.

“

"In the nineteenth century, families came to Indianapolis from the South, Europe, the East, and the rural Midwest and settled in the Circle City. The city's near-Westside became home to many of these new arrivals, including a large African-American

community that lived along and near Indiana Avenue. With the Avenue as its central artery, the near-Westside became home to a legion of Black businesses ranging from barber shops and undertakers' parlors to the Indianapolis Recorder's offices and the world-renowned Madam C.J. Walker's beauty supply plant."

Ransom Place Archaeology Field School

Ransom Place Historic District

Ever since its establishment in 1821, Indianapolis has been a multicultural city. The Ransom Place Archaeology Project focused on documenting, studying, and recording the lives of Black Americans in such a diverse place.

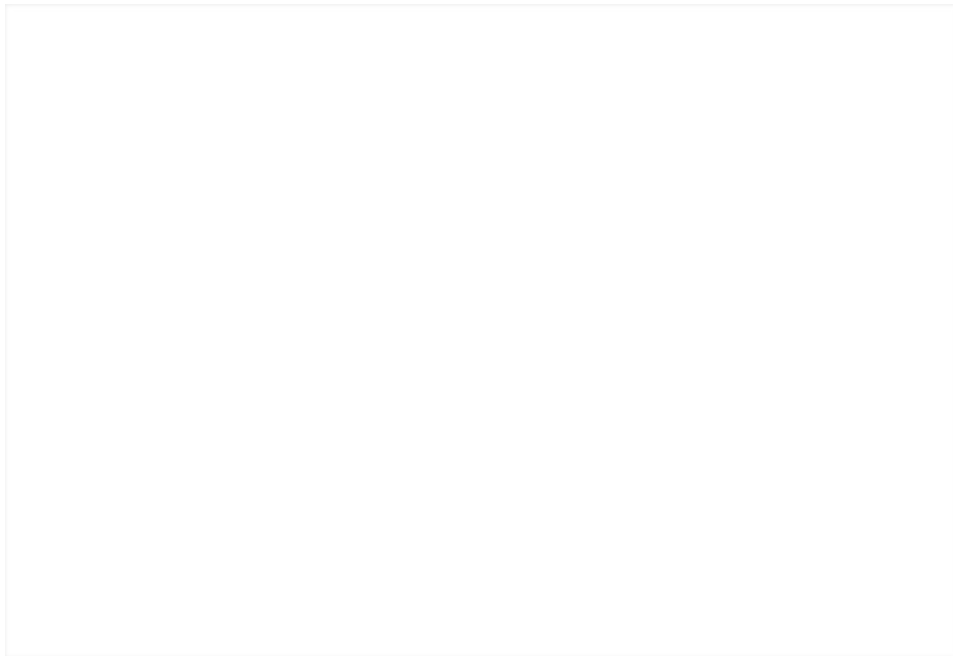
As a cooperative project between IUPUI and the Ransom Place Neighborhood Association, the project relied on excavations, research of oral history, and public interpretation to investigate the complex confluence of Black American culture, business and consumption, and the dynamics of race and its systemic construct in Indiana's capital city. Though Black Americans have lived in this community since the 1840s, they've also assembled in neighborhoods alongside virtually every European immigrant group that came to Indianapolis in the nineteenth century. From the Irish, German, Russian, and Hungarian, to Italian newcomers, these are among the people who called the near-Westside home.

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“My mother attended Manual High School—when she was growing up—and graduated from Emmerich

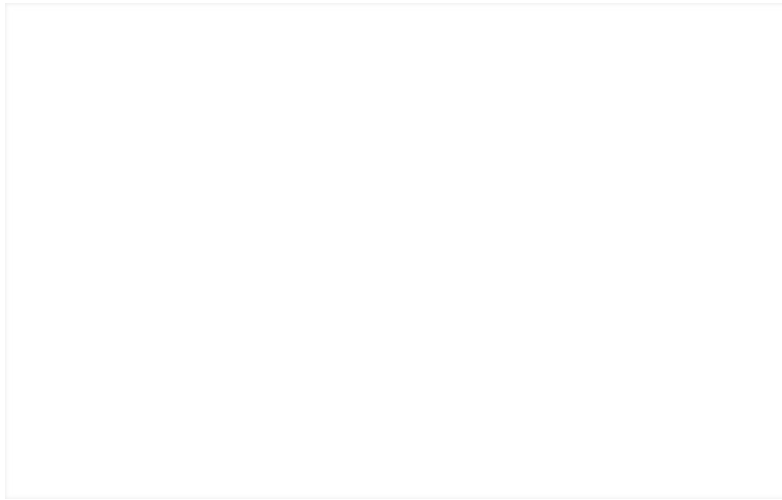
Manual High School. At that time Manual stressed the German language a lot. That was the big language in that day out of Emmerich Manual. And my mother spoke German fairly well. You know... they used it a lot."

Thomas Ridley, *Price of Progress* (2010)



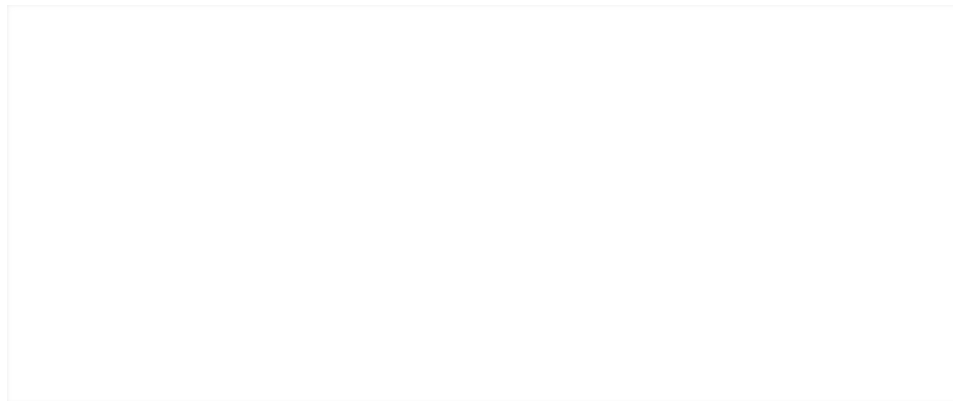
Thomas Ridley at the 2001 IUPUI Archaeology Field School group photo

By the early 1900s, Ransom Place and the neighborhoods closest to Indiana Avenue had become predominantly "African-American," and it remained so until the community's decline from the 1950s onward (Ransom Place Archaeology, 2001).



1912 Postcard of the Indianapolis Casket company

Following this decline, the expanding campus of IUPUI acquired the space this community occupied, primarily purchasing the real estate, and in others simply waited for years. Regardless of how the space was acquired, the historic, old, predominantly African-American, and very deep-rooted community was displaced.



"This 1975 image above shows the house of Ira and Marie Johnson at 725 West Vermont Street: these residents and their last few neighbors already were engulfed by IUPUI parking lots," (Ransom Place Archaeology). See this [link](#) for more information.

This StoryMap focuses on one space, designated as "12MA869" during Dr. Mullins Summer 2001 Ransom Place Archaeology Field School, which was offered as a class (ANTH-P 305/405) at IUPUI. This space was occupied by many different people prior to displacement, many of whom we cannot know, as it has been lost to time and forgotten. However, we do know this site was primarily

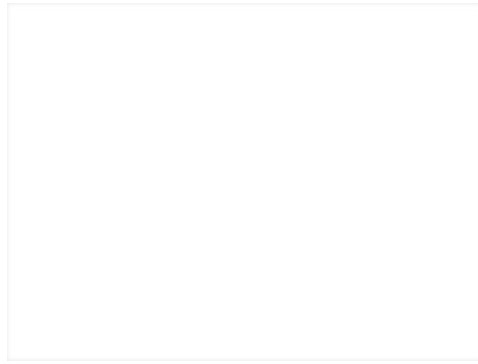
the location of a German-run butchery and business while also neighboring an African-American-owned and operated boarding house. Later, a house was also built on the site. This is just a small part of that story.



(From left to right): An aerial view taken during the 1960s, prior to the demolition of homes. In contrast, *"most of the streets remain in the same place today, but now the blocks north of Military Park (the right side of this picture) are mostly parking lots"* (Ransom Place Archaeology Field School, 2001). The proximate estimate of where the Evans Boarding House would've been standing today is boxed in red with guiding arrows on its left and bottom end.



Evans-Deschler Site through the Times



[1848] Arrival of German immigrants to the U.S. and the founding of Athenaeum

The German Republican movement failed, sending a hopeful, progressive middle-class to the U.S., where German-language newspapers and social clubs are founded. Many of these German immigrants came to Indianapolis.

This is the time period where the local restaurant Athenaeum (Rathskeller) can be traced back to, although they would not be officially founded until later.

[1860] The Deschler couple arrives in the States

John and Helana Deschler immigrate from Germany.



[1870s] Second Wave of German Immigrants

A second wave of German immigrants follows en suite, mainly manual laborers from the eastern regions practicing distinct cultures. As German communities began to flourish in Indianapolis, 91 German-American businesses were eventually founding on 3 Washington Street Blocks.

[1880] Meat production centralized in cities

Indianapolis became the 3rd largest pork-packing city in the U.S., as refrigeration and railways made it possible to transport meat longer distances. Cities became centralized producers of meat.



John Deschler manages Market House Stall

The Market House Stall was run by John Deschler. Furthermore, very small grocery stores were fairly common at the time, based on Patrice Abdullah remarking, *“Indiana Avenue was a world within itself. We had everything that we wanted right there on Indiana Avenue. We didn’t have to go downtown. We had various places that we were able to go--neighborhood grocery stores and that kind of thing,”* (*Price of Progress*, Mullins & White).



[1890] Indianapolis residents of German descent

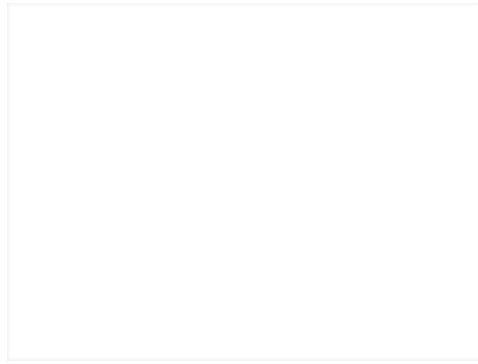
Around this time, 18% of Indianapolis' population is of German ancestry (this is part of a larger trend in the Midwest in general).

Deschler family founds grocery store

The Deschler family runs a grocery store at 151 Agnes.

Relocation of the Deschler family later on

Deschler family relocates and moves to 423 California street.



[1898] New Deschler home neighboring meat-cutting store

The newly-relocated Deschler family was neighboring a building next to their home, labeled "meat cutting." According to Sandra Brown from *Price of Progress*, the following may be said about the meat-cutting establishment: *"My father had worked at Kingan's... I forgot about that. He would come home with bloody clothes on... it was a slaughterhouse."*

Athenaeum is founded as well, mainly by social groups of German immigrants.

[1900] Beginnings of Evans Boarding House

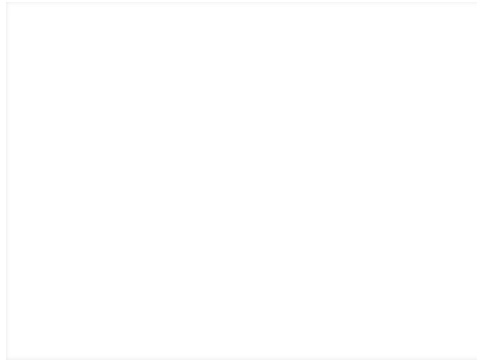
A boarding house is owned by Albert and Lillie Henderson, initially consisting of 5 lodgers.

Eventual splitting of the boarding house

Boarding House lot is split, adding a single family residence, wall is 3' from butcher

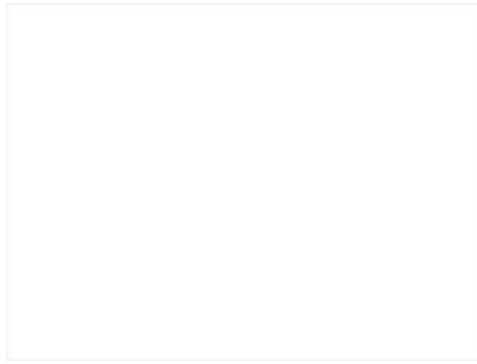
The Steinmetz's Market House meat market

Jacob L. and Edwin Steinmetz establish the Market House meat market.



[1906] Upton Sinclair's "The Jungle"

Upton Sinclair's famous The Jungle is published, shocking Americans with its grotesque depictions of slaughterhouse conditions, as well as the abysmal living and working conditions of the workers. The accounts of working-class poverty, lack of social work, and harsh working conditions, though fictional, prompted Theodore Roosevelt to pass the Pure Food and Drug Act (1906) and advance sanitation reform.



[1910] New Deschler rental home

John Deschler Jr. rents a new home. The image above indicates the location of the newly-rented home.

Boarding house ownership transferred to Ms. Evans

Hattie Evans, gains ownership of the boarding House, providing residence to 4 lodgers.

64-year-old Evans and lodger Edna Jones also worked as laundresses for private families, while Belle Thompson was a domestic worker, an office building employed John Curry as one of their janitors, and Richard Bowling worked as a cook in a cafe. Though it is common for Black American at the time to work manual labor positions for White residences and workplaces, their lives nonetheless cultivated a multicultural scene. The Evans Boarding House is one of three Black American households, making up 2% of the Super Block.

[1914] New ownership under Wesley L. Lockridge and Belle Thompson

Wesley L. Lockridge and Belle Thompson became the new "heads of the household" for the boarding house. Mr. Lockridge frequently drove an ash wagon and remained at the home (still on California St.) well into the 1920s. Another building stood, identified as the "Steinmetz Packing Co./Meat Cutting and Packing."

[~1914-1916] Founding of the Merritt Place Methodist Episcopal Church

Between 1914 and 1916, the Merritt Place Methodist Episcopal church was founded at the northwest corner of New York and California St. and identified itself as one of the churches that declared the Super Block neighborhood as home. A remodeled house served as the basis for the church, the ensuing congregation remained there until at least 1935.

[1919]

California Street shop closes down.

Events following after the Closing of California St.



[1920] Solidifying a Demographic

Neighborhood is identified predominantly African-American, where a single family home on lots 423-25 of California St. houses 14 Black Americans.

[1927] Decline of the meat-packing businesses

All meat packing structures were torn down, and the 423-25 house appeared on a map for the last time.

1941

423-25 house is torn down, not known by who, and remains as a grass backyard until the 60s. Urban renewal was initiated on a federal, state, and local level after World War II, and primarily targeted African-American communities (particularly like the residents near the west side of Indianapolis).

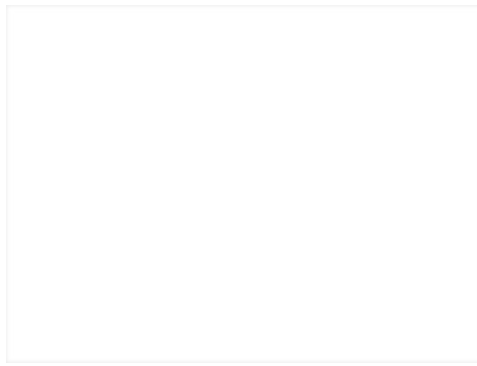
"Some legislation was aimed at erasing urban 'blight,' and there certainly were very challenging conditions in many cities. However, many wholesale removals also erased thriving African-American communities that were definitely not 'slums.' In some cities' removals secured property for the expansion of state and local governments; in others, it secured land for interstate expansion; and in some, it broke up powerful African-American voting blocks: All of those things happened in Indianapolis, and the social, psychological, and material repercussions of widespread racial marginalization and displacement remain unaddressed and raw legacy in many communities, including Indianapolis," (Price of Progress, Mullins & White).



[1969] Merging of Indiana University and Purdue University

The two universities, with campuses all over Indiana, decided to merge and establish an Indianapolis location. IUPUI, fulfilled the wishes to establish a "great state university in Indianapolis" of Richard Lugar (Indianapolis' mayor, 1968) by offering programs stemming in the liberal arts, sciences, and medicine. The remaining community is displaced.



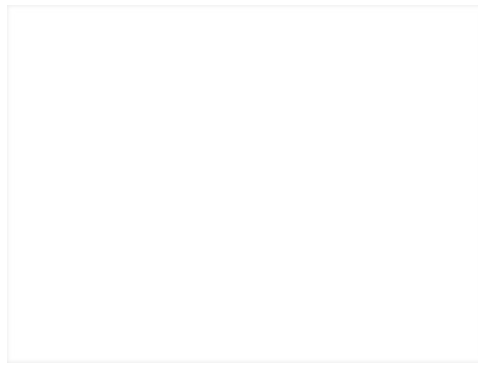


[2000] Ransom Place Archaeology Field School founded

The archaeological field school centered for this StoryMap began conducting excavations and other means of research in the Ransom Place Historic District, delving into a collaborative project between IUPUI and the Ransom Place Neighborhood Association.

At the same time, the local paper reports on the excavations.

Outlined in a children's camp from the *Indiana Recorder*, which was done at the Evans-Deschler site in downtown Indianapolis, led by Paul Mullins (pg. A6, *Indiana Recorder*). The aim of the project, as the executive director of Freetown Village Ophelia Wellington puts it, is that “*we want kids to experience things they might not be able to see. It may turn some kids on; they may want to be archaeologists.*”



[2001] Relocation of IU McKinney School of Law

Concurrently with the excavations conducted by the field school, IU's law school also relocated later that summer.

The local paper reports on the excavations at the same time.

**Today, this StoryMap found its way to
you!**



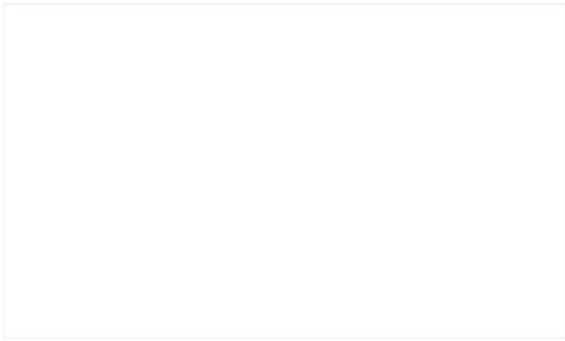
The Collection

The various objects found at the Evans-Deschler site provide a view into the past, as well as a view into the self-identity of African Americans at that time, and how others treated them and made them feel.

Animal Bones	There were numerous animal bones, faunal remains, found at the site, specifically pig bones, a very weathered dog skeleton, and a single rodent mandible.
Beauty Products	Many different buttons were found at the site, with the possibility of being related to jobs like laundresses and seamstresses, which were both common for people living in the Evans Boarding House, as well as jobs commonly relegated to women of color.
Buttons	The location of the Evans-Deschler site was in close proximity to the Madame Walker beauty school, and to the factories where such beauty products were made. There would have been advertisements and possible solicitation door-to-door for these products. However, there was a scarcity of these products in the artifact collection for the site.

A German Connection

This ceramic bottle of "Kronthaler Mineral Quellen" was found during excavation of the site, and could have potentially been brought back from Germany by a relative, or after a trip, or may

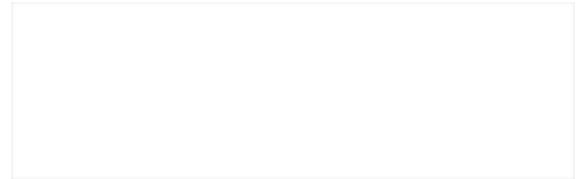


have simply been imported luxury water - something we still do today. Either way, it was likely seen as a connection to a home far away.

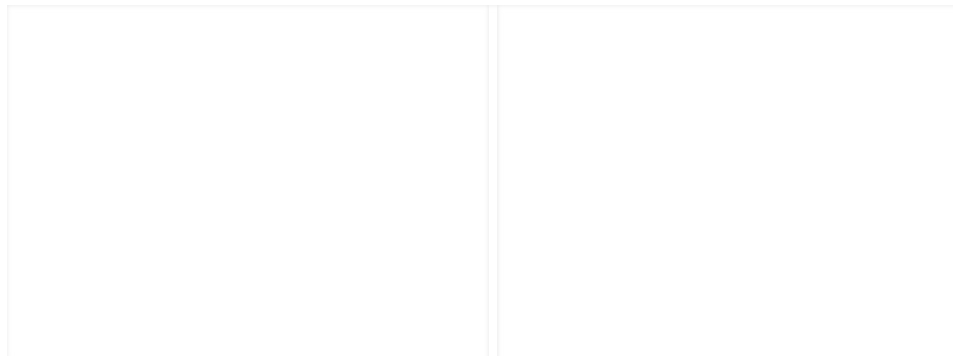
Other Artifacts

Ceramic bottle of "Kronthaler Mineral Quellen" in comparison to modern Evian bottles of today.

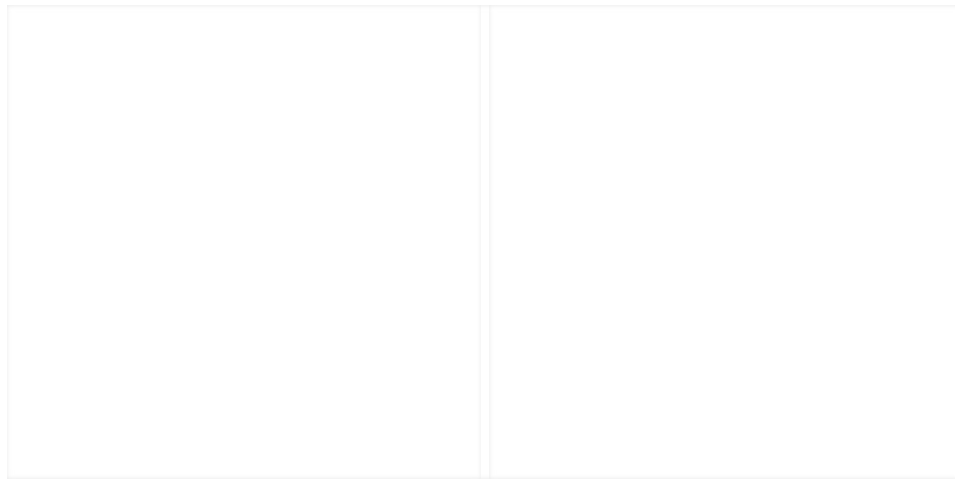
Although likely just a simple, even handmade, button, it is reminiscent of typical horn buttons on Trachtenhemd shirts from Germany.



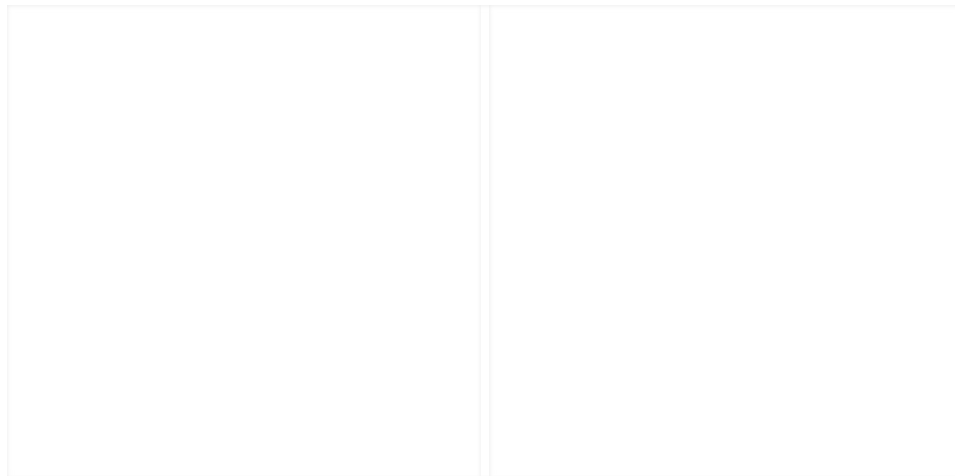
(Far left image) Excavated button, (middle image) one of the authors donning a Trachtenhemd, (far right image) a reminiscent German coin.



(Left image) A rusty ring, described by Paul Mullins as costume jewelry. (Right image) A student of the field school holding up a medicine bottle (1920-1935).



(Left image) Letter opener, found in packing shop engine room. (Right image) Imperial Mange Medicine bottle, deposited around the time shops were destroyed.



(Left image) Labeled as "Personal Goods," found in Deschler trench. (Right image) Cosmetic compact found in Deschler trench.



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